

**REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION
HENDERSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

MEETING DATE: April 16, 2008

SUBJECT: Inmate Work Crew Program

ATTACHMENT(S): Yes

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

One of the growing trends across the State of North Carolina is the use of inmate work crews by local law enforcement agencies. The attached articles illustrate how Wake County and Mecklenburg County have implemented these programs. These types of program offer tremendous opportunities for keeping our County clean through litter pick-up programs, beautification projects for schools, libraries and recreation facilities, and stream clean-up projects. The need in Henderson County is substantial.

Sheriff Davis will be attending today's Board of Commissioners meeting to discuss his plans for implementing such a program within Henderson County and asking for the Board of Commissioners' support. County Management supports the implementation of this program as a cost-effective strategy towards addressing longstanding needs. Staff estimates that \$8,000-\$10,000 is needed for start-up expenses such as safety equipment and other required equipment to support the program. These expenses may be funded from recycling funds due to the efforts of County staff to maximize these revenues.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

Sheriff Davis will be present at the meeting to lay out his plan for implementing an inmate work program in Henderson County. The Sheriff will present an implementation plan along with resources necessary to make the program a success.

SUGGESTED MOTION:

I move that the Board of Commissioners support the Sheriff's efforts to implement an inmate work crew program and further move that staff be authorized to expend up to \$10,000 from the Solid Waste - Recycling Fund to support the program.

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Inmate litter crews return to Wake highways

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Prison inmates are returning to major highways in Wake County to pick up litter for the first time since a prisoner was struck and killed in July while clearing trash from Interstate 40.

The state transportation and correction departments announced this week that they have started a pilot program to improve safety for work crews, state employees and motorists.

The program organizes inmate laborers into larger groups and assigns them to longer stretches of highway.

Four crews totaling 32 inmates and up to eight corrections officers are being assigned to major highways such as I-40, I-540, I-440, U.S. 1/64 and the U.S. 64/264 Bypass. At least three crews per day will pick up litter along the routes four days a week, state officials said.

At the same time, the state will close road shoulders and use electronic highway signs to warn motorists of work. The state Highway Patrol and local law enforcement officers will focus on enforcing work zone speed limits in the clean-up area.

Trash has been piling up along major highways in Wake County since the state stopped using inmate crews along four-lane roads where speed limits were above 55 mph.

The new policy was triggered by the death of Charles G. "Peanut" Wilson, who was working on a roadside crew on I-40 near Lake Wheeler Road. Wilson was killed when a sport utility vehicle ran off the road and overturned on top of him.

"The safety of everyone involved in litter cleanup is a top priority," Correction Secretary Theodis Beck said in a news release, which announced the joint effort of the two state agencies.

"The new precautions implemented through this pilot will go a long way in ensuring the safety of our crews, improving the condition of our roadsides and strengthening the future of this important interagency partnership."

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Inmate Work Crews

The sight of orange jump-suited inmates working in parks or along roadsides has become common place in Mecklenburg County since Inmate Work Crews were established by Sheriff Jim Pendergraph in March 1995, shortly after he took office. "My philosophy is that we have inmates who are serving time. There is no reason that they should not be paying something back to our community."

A 1995 *Charlotte Observer* editorial put it this way: "Whether jail inmates should be put on work crews while serving time may have been controversial when proposed last fall, but when the first inmate work crew went out this week, the results were hard to argue with. . . . Sheriff Pendergraph deserves commendation for putting the crew concept into action. Our parks alone offer more than enough work to keep them busy for months."



Inmate Work Crew

The Sheriff's Office Inmate Work Crews have been partners in the Clean Sweep Program. Working with the city's Community Improvement and Neighborhood Development divisions, police Community Relations Officers, neighborhood action groups and private businesses like Container Corporation and BFI, the work crews help clean up specific neighborhoods in the "City Within A City" area.

Specifically, the crews participate in weekend clean sweep programs. The weekend work crews help clean up targeted neighborhoods. The goal is to make the neighborhoods safer and better places to live for law-abiding citizens and to make life more difficult for criminal elements.



Typical projects range from picking up trash along roadsides and beautification projects for schools, libraries, and parks- particularly stream cleanups. Recent projects included cleaning Springfield Park, graffiti removal at McAlway Park, and gutting seven abandoned houses for the Cherry Community. One ongoing special project is to assist Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' warehouse staff in putting together science kits for all area schools.

The crew is equipped with two buses, a pick-up truck, power tools, and hand

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tools. The crew is divided into two teams of three that operate seven days a week. The highest number of inmates that can work under the direction of three officers is 20. Despite initial concerns about security, there have been no escapes, or any attempted, since the program began ten years ago.

In the 2003-2004 calendar year, the Inmate Work Crew worked a total of 34,493.50 hours. Based on a minimum wage of \$10.15 per hour, their efforts have saved taxpayers more than 340,055.85.

Requests for assistance for the Sheriff's Office Inmate Work Crew can be made by calling 704.336.8164.



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Mar 26, 2008

Levy uses inmate work crews

By LISE FISHER
Sun staff writer

The Levy County Sheriff's Office is using inmates, volunteering in the agency's new inmate work squad program, to help keep the county beautiful.

Four to six inmates serving sentences at the Levy County jail go out during the week to pick up trash along county roads, the Sheriff's Office reported.

The work program started earlier this month. So far, inmates have cleaned up an estimated 20,000 pounds of debris along the county's roads, according to the Sheriff's Office.

"It's kind of a first in the Sheriff's Office history," said agency spokesman Lt. Evan Sullivan.

The program helps keep the roads clean, provides a free work crew and gives the inmate volunteers gain time applied toward their sentence. The Sheriff's Office is managing the work squad using officers already employed with the law enforcement agency.

"I think it's a win-win situation as far as the taxpayers, too," Sullivan said.

Jail inmates are eligible for five days of gain time for every 30 days of good behavior, Sullivan said. Work squad volunteers get one day of gain time for a week of work.

Inmates who "act up" while working on the squad are removed from the program and don't earn gain time. So far, there have been no problems involving the inmates, Sullivan said.

No violent offenders are allowed to work on the squad, according to the Sheriff's Office.

The Alachua County Sheriff's Office launched its own work squad program late last year. In February, inmates pressure-washed and landscaped areas along Seminary Lane for the Gainesville Housing Authority and also did work for the Gainesville Regional Airport. The Sheriff's Office has estimated the work crews saved the county more than \$6,000 last month.

Sullivan said there are no plans at this time to expand the kind of projects the work squad is assigned to.

"We're pretty much going to stick to the illegal dumping and the trash," he said.

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